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MATERIALISM IN POLITICS

by
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PREFATORY NOTE

ONLY a few weeks after the delivery of this lecture Professor Stocks died suddenly while on a visit to South Wales; this is, therefore, probably the last work to which he put his hand. His friends are anxious to put on record the debt they owe to his generous and tolerant spirit. A wise administrator, a stimulating teacher, a scholar who linked academic learning to creative practice, he made a profound impression on the universities he served. Nor was his effort confined to university life. He was an outstanding figure in the civic life of Manchester. He was a warm friend of adult education all over the country. His position in the Labour movement had been recognized by his eager adoption as the Labour candidate for the University of Oxford. Even in the brief weeks of his Vice-Chancellorship at Liverpool University, he had won the high regard of his colleagues and had made a deep impression upon the city.

All his life he was the friend of great causes. All his life, too, whether in war or in peace, he fought for them without bitterness and with a deep understanding. He made many lasting friendships; it is believed that he never made an enemy. Few men of his generation were more widely trusted; few men embraced important responsibilities more single-mindedly. He was a worthy representative of the great Oxford tradition which gave us T. H. Green in one period and Leonard Hobhouse in the next. His memory will last while his friends live. They are grateful for the inspiration he gave them.

H. J. L.

MATERIALISM IN POLITICS

I

Materialism

EUROPEAN thought is governed still to an unknown extent by the framework supplied by Aristotle, and it is doubtful whether the current uses of the word 'materialism' could be fully explained except by reference to his theory of causation. Materialism is sometimes defined, for example, as the doctrine that matter alone is real. But, if this is right, why should the principle of the economic interpretation of history, preached by Karl Marx, be regarded as a form of materialism? It is true that Marx did in fact lay stress on the importance of physical conditions, and especially of the tools of labour, as determining the direction of human effort and the forms of social organization, but on analysis these are seen to be significant only in relation to human needs and desires, so that if these needs and desires were removed from the world, the tools would not exist, and the forms of social organization would disappear.

In the context, of course, of a two-substance theory of nature, which views matter and mind as wholly disparate substances existing side by side and in no way dependent the one on the other, materialism as defined above acquires a definite meaning. It means the denial of the alleged spirit-substance, and the attempt to show that the various phenomena commonly classed as mental or spiritual, such as the life of plants and animals, the emotions, thoughts and desires of men,

can all be interpreted as fundamentally physical in their nature. And it is, I suppose, this two-substance theory, propagated by the powerful influence of Descartes in the seventeenth century, which determines the immediate significance of the term 'materialism' as we use it to-day. Not that Descartes's theory was ever even so generally accepted that it could truly be said to constitute the orthodoxy of any period. But it was no mere invention of Descartes. It had ancient roots, going back ultimately, like much in his thought, to St. Augustine and Plato. His theory was only a rather extreme and provocative version of a belief which derived powerful reinforcement from the religious dogmas of resurrection and immortality. But those who held to these dogmas did not necessarily accept Descartes's account of the matter. In the same century in which Descartes wrote, Hobbes and Gassendi both avowed themselves complete materialists. In his *Leviathan* Hobbes writes:¹

'The World (I mean not the Earth only . . . but the Universe, i.e. the whole mass of all things that are) is Corporeal, that is to say Body, . . . also every part of Body is likewise Body, and consequently every part of the Universe is Body, and that which is not Body is no part of the Universe. . . . And because the Universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere.'

Hobbes might be suspected of being an unbeliever, but later in the century John Locke, whose devotion to Christianity was unquestioned, writing normally in terms of two parallel substances, was yet evidently uneasy as to their separation, as is seen from his willingness to entertain the hypothesis that matter might be conceived as capable of thought.

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, c. 46, p. 497 (ed. Waller).

But even if the immediate form taken by the modern conception of materialism is determined by the opposition of material and spiritual substance, there are in it also, I suggest, traces of an older opposition, which was formulated by Aristotle and comes to the western world from him. I mean the opposition of Form and Matter. It is this opposition, not the foregoing, which governs my understanding of the word. All natural objects are complexes of varying degrees of complexity, and a human being, with its rich variety of physical and mental functions and attributes, is merely a particularly complex physical object. Materialism, if it is to be regarded as a general theory of nature, must be expressed as a general theory concerning the genesis and organization of these complexes. Such a theory Aristotle himself possessed. He expounded it in his doctrine of the Four Causes, a doctrine which has perhaps exerted a more continuous influence on European thought than any philosophical doctrine which has ever been formulated. Every natural thing, in his view, from the rock beneath our feet to the stars above our heads, was a specimen of formed matter. In all cases certain pre-existing materials had been moulded into a certain shape. Aristotle's view was that in all cases the operative principle in this process was not the matter, the pre-existing materials themselves, but the form which these materials were destined to embody when the process was complete. There was a materialism current in his day to which he, following his master Plato, was opposed. It was the attitude which insisted on a reversal of this last statement, insisting that the operative principle, in all natural processes, resided in the pre-existing materials, that these created

spontaneously their own form out of themselves. This seemed to him and to Plato incredible because in the case of man it deprived human thought and will of all independent significance, and in the case of the world generally because it represented growth and progress as no more than a lucky accident.

My own philosophical inquiries, pursued over a number of years in various fields, seem to me to converge more and more on the point that if a tenable theory of the natural world is to be framed, it must be on the basis of a recovery of a conception of cause closely resembling the Aristotelian form. I feel, consequently, that the modern tendency which requires most urgently to be corrected is the tendency to a materialism which denies the possibility of such causation. This tendency is very powerful in every field to-day. It derives great support from the natural sciences, because it is the special function of science with its analytic methods to explain things in terms of their components and previous history, i.e. to exploit the material cause.

II

The Materialist as Democrat

IN the field of politics there are two influential sets of ideas in relation to which modern materialism shows itself powerful to distort and pervert judgement, with results which are of practical as well as of theoretical importance. These are, first, the ideas connected with the word democracy, in which most of us profess to believe; secondly, the ideas connected with Marx's Dialectical Materialism, crystallized politically into Communism, with which most of us profess to disagree.

I believe myself to be justified in advocating democracy and in repudiating Communism, but I also feel that the claims of democracy, in the form in which they are often advanced, contain a fundamental error which is in principle identical with that of the Communist. What I want to show is that both doctrines—the one sometimes and by a kind of inadvertence, the other always and deliberately—involve materialism in the broad sense in which I have defined it—the denial of the formal cause, the assertion that the materials are competent to provide their own form—and that so far as they involve this both are rightly rejected because they do not make sense.

Take first Democracy. This is one of the ideas which came into general currency about the time of the French Revolution, and were notably helped to spread by it. Its early European prophet was Rousseau, whose writings dominated much Revolutionary thought, and still exert a powerful influence to-day. He starts his political theory in its maturest form (in the *Contrat social*) with the problem how the chains of government are to be justified. That is to say, he takes it for granted that government involves restraint upon the citizen, and asks what makes such restraint legitimate. His answer is that these chains are legitimated when they proceed from the collective decision of a community which is legislating for itself. The citizens of a free country, therefore, will not delegate the legislative power. If they did, they would barter away their freedom. They will keep this power in their own hands, and legislating for themselves they will continue to be free in spite of the restraints on personal initiative which may be involved. In all this the word democracy

is not mentioned by Rousseau, but the general idea is that government is not opposed to freedom where you have self-government, which he explains as meaning that a plenary assembly of adult citizens legislates for itself.

Rousseau's interpretation of self-government may be disputed, but his refusal to use the name democracy did not and does not conceal the fact that in arguing for self-government as a precondition of freedom he was voicing the fundamental democratic demand. He only uses the word democracy when he comes to consider what *he* calls the problem of government, i.e. (as we might say) the question how to constitute the other parts of government which remain when the function of legislation has been taken away. And when he comes to this question, he decides very properly against democracy. It is, he sees, impossible that a people should actually administer its own laws, and exact from individuals the punishments which are inflicted for the breach of them. Democracy in this sense is a baseless figment of the imagination, or, as he also says, 'Were there a people of gods, their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men.' On this account he was attacked as a traitor to democracy in a contemporary pamphlet bearing the title, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau Aristocrate*.

Rousseau, as has been said, rejected representation. He was consequently opposed to the idealization of English parliamentary government which Montesquieu had made fashionable in his day. He looked for the realization of his ideas by the formation of small States like the City-States of Ancient Greece, and he made the further suggestion that the obvious inconveniences of such a change could be obviated by some scheme of

federation. But he did not work this out, and those who were inspired by his ideas were inevitably forced to come to terms with representative government. The line they took was (if I may use current terms) to interpret representation as delegation. In places like England where representation was an effective political factor, the representative had by this time won his freedom. Burke's famous speech to the Electors of Bristol is dated 1774. It shows that the relation was still a matter of controversy, but claims confidently for the Member of Parliament a freedom which in practice at that time he was always granted, and which since that time, in England at least, he has never been refused. But the followers of Rousseau in the French Conventions of the revolutionary years had not the evidence of this development before them, and probably would not have perceived its significance if they had had it. Holding fast to the idea of a people as self-governing, or at least as determining its own laws, they regarded it as obvious that freedom on the part of representatives meant unfreedom on the part of the represented. The people of England, Rousseau had said, are free only at the time of a general election, i.e. when the representative body does not exist. Therefore they welcomed any proposal tending to make the representative conceive himself as the mouthpiece of his constituents. The constituents should be able, they argued, at any time to cancel the representative's mandate, if he should be seen to vote contrary to their wishes. In the National Convention of 1793 Robespierre urged the necessary and *physical* responsibility of all public functionaries including the members of the legislative body.

'A people,' he said, 'whose representatives have not to account

to any one for their conduct, has no constitution. A people whose officials are accountable only to inviolable representatives has no constitution, since it is in the power of the latter to betray it with impunity and to allow it to be betrayed by the former. If that is what representative government means, I confess that I accept all the anathemas which J. J. Rousseau pronounced against it.”¹

It was these tendencies which led the Convention, when the followers of Rousseau had failed to secure their majority, to make the curious constitutional provision (since then incorporated with slight variations in many later constitutions) that the deputy was to regard himself not as the representative of a constituency, but of the whole nation.

In modern times the Rousseauistic strain still survives; it even seems indeed recently to have gained in strength. Its typical expression is to be found in a whole series of constitutional projects and provisions which have for their common object the prevention of divergence of opinion between the electorate and the elected body. The representative system has of course as one of its main features a device for securing this end. It provides in all cases that each member of the elected body shall only enjoy the right of participating in legislation and government for a limited period, at the end of which he has to seek fresh authority from the electors. The calculation evidently is that this situation will make him want to serve and please them, and thus tend to win for the word representation more than a mere legal significance. Legally no doubt he has power to consent to anything on their behalf, and they will be bound by the decision which results from the votes of

¹ Esmein, *Traité de Droit Constitutionnel*, vol. i, p. 448.

him and his fellow representatives; but his dependence for continuance in office on the votes of his constituents will lead him to consider carefully their wishes and their interests, and to vote on lines which are likely to be generally agreeable to them.

But the followers of Rousseau think that this does not go far enough. They argue that he should have an explicit mandate from the electors for each vote, or for the more important of them; and since the growing complications of the work of Parliaments have made the imperative mandate an obvious absurdity, they seek to secure a substitute for this by increasing use of the device of the Referendum, by which a matter is taken out of the hands of Parliament altogether and referred for decision to the votes of the electorate. By an extension of this device they provide that legislative or constitutional changes can actually be initiated outside the representative body on terms which reduce that body to an almost equal degree of passivity. A century ago again they were pressing for the principle that the intervals between elections should be made as short as possible. The Chartists asked for annual Parliaments. This demand also the growing responsibilities of Parliaments have reduced to absurdity. So now, by way of substitute, they fall back on constitutional provisions by which exceptional dissolutions of Parliament, before the fixed term has expired, may be effected by popular demand. You can all probably think of other illustrations of this tendency to qualify and limit in various ways the freedom of the representative and of the representative body. There is no sign of its cessation. The post-war constitutions are full of it. The recall has not, so far as I know, had any trial on a national

scale, but it was embodied in the original Soviet constitution of the Russian Federation, and it has had a considerable vogue in the smaller units of government in U.S.A. The penetrating studies by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb of trade union history and organization show this conception or misconception of democracy at work on almost every page.

This is the most dangerous and the most persistent of the fallacies of democracy. It may be called (after Shaw's *Apple Cart*) the fallacy of the rubber stamp. It ignores the fundamental fact that democracy is a form of *government*, converting it into a form of no-government or anarchy. That is really what Rousseau meant when he said that only a people of gods could be governed democratically. He was accepting the notion common to his age that government was only occasioned by human weakness and wickedness, with its corollary that a community of perfectly good men would not require to be governed at all. It is thus that his two statements which I have quoted about democracy are reconciled. He said first that it was impossible, secondly that it was too good for men. If he had expressed himself fully, what he would have said was that where any form of government other than legislation is required, it must be provided on some principle other than the democratic principle, and that such forms of government will everywhere be required while men are men. And in all this he is assuming of course that the problem of legislation has already been solved on democratic lines, that the community in question has laid down for itself (possibly, as he rather inconsequently adds, with the assistance of a divinely inspired legislator) the principles of social organization, and

further that (if only human frailty did not obstruct) these would be so graven on the heart of the citizen that no force or penalty would be needed to secure their observance.

Now it is certain that there can be government where there is nothing that we should call law. First comes government, then by slow degrees law, then the machinery of consent, growing by elaboration over centuries into the formidable representative apparatus with which we are familiar. The whole secular process has as its starting-point the fact of government, which remains its ultimate presupposition. Government is not necessarily by law, and to this day is in different countries in very different degrees bound by law. Law is not necessarily dependent for existence on the prior consent of the subjects, and even in the most democratic countries is never fully dependent on it. In all cases from the extreme of absolutism to the mildest of parliamentary régimes the fundamental fact is the relation between certain people who have authority vested in them and the mass of people over whom they have authority. Through the whole historical development this relation persists, but it suffers in its evolution two great and fundamental modifications, the first when it accepts the rule of law, the second as it provides increasingly for the consent of the governed. These two developments on the original stock of government both owe their origin and vitality to the idea of freedom. The very fact of government is a standing threat to the desire of subjects to be free to go their ways. The rule of law binding the governors gives the negative guarantee that (as Locke says) the governed will not be 'subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of

another man'. The principle of consent, as it develops, establishes more and more firmly the guarantee of a more positive freedom, securing that they shall always have the opportunity of contributing to the substance of the rules to which governors and governed alike are pledged to submit.

The important point is that these two great modifications of the original idea of government are accretions upon it which only make clearer its real nature: they are in no contradiction with it. The primitive government which preceded the invention of written law was not the arbitrary rule against which Locke protests as no government, and against which law guarantees the subject: it was only a form of government which contained no explicit features precluding such perversion of the relation of ruler and subject. Similarly the lawful governments of predemocratic and undemocratic times and countries are not governments which do not rest upon consent at all: they are merely governments which make no explicit provision for securing the consent of the governed to law and policy. But enthusiasts for these relatively recent developments, law and democracy, often overstate their case. Thus there is a famous and oft quoted statement of Aristotle's concerning Law (*Pol.* iii. 16. 5). 'He who bids the law rule may be deemed to bid God and reason alone rule, but he who bids man rule adds an element of the beast; for desire is a wild beast, and passion perverts the minds of rulers, even when they are the best of men.' But note the words 'may be deemed'. Aristotle knew quite well that this opposition was false. The question is not whether man or law shall rule, but whether man shall rule through and by law or not. Similarly enthusiasts for

democracy found themselves in ancient Greece at odds with the principle of the rule of law, since the sanctity of law seemed inconsistent with their idea of freedom, and ultimately at odds with the fact of government itself, so that for Aristotle and Plato democracy in its extreme forms approximated to anarchy. But what they were fighting was not surely democracy but a misreading of it. If democracy is to be a principle of *government* it must be so construed as to preserve the rule of law and the fact of government.

Let me now try to translate some of the controversies which we have reviewed into the more philosophical terms from which we started. Where is the form and what is the matter of a Commonwealth? The matter evidently is the lives of its citizens, which are to be seen, so far as the political state is justified, as preserved, moulded, and enriched by the organized social context which the political authority exists to maintain and develop. The formative impulse has to come from the government, i.e. from certain persons told off to think for the community and to act in its name. A community will not and cannot organize itself. There is no possibility of a spontaneous generation by which matter provides its own form. But it can and will react, fruitfully or otherwise, to the formative activities of which it is the subject, and in so doing it will necessarily limit those activities and may profoundly modify them. The false dream which misleads the Rousseauistic democrat is the dream that this reaction may finally be converted into action, so that the formative activity may be dispensed with altogether. He sees this activity of government as something external, ignoring the fact that it falls within the community, and therefore sees

it as a qualification on the self-determination of the corporate body. Thus in philosophical terms he is a materialist, denying the necessity of a formal cause. And in the end he, like his brother materialist in the field of natural science, is forced to leave growth and progress to chance. The atoms of the scientist had no thought of the world they were making: it represents only a pattern into which they happened to fall. Similarly in society the multitude of citizens can hardly be credited as individuals with thought and purpose in regard to the policy which their actions are generating. A mystical confidence in a super-individual General Will may conceal this weakness from those who accept Rousseau's position, but to those not so blinded it will surely be obvious.

III

The Materialist as Social Historian

PERHAPS the best short statement of Marx's position is one which he wrote himself in the Preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*:

'My investigations led to the conclusion that legal relations as well as forms of State could not be understood from themselves, nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but on the contrary are rooted in the material conditions of life, the aggregate of which Hegel, following the precedent of the English and French of the XVIIIth century, grouped under the name of "civil society"; but that the anatomy of civil society is to be found in political economy. The general conclusion I arrived at—and once reached, it served as the guiding thread in my studies—can be briefly formulated as follows:—In the social production of their means of existence men enter into definite, necessary relations which are independent of their will, productive relationships which correspond

to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The aggregate of these productive relationships constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises, and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.¹

There is, of course, much that is true and important for the student of politics in this statement. It is true that political and legal forms do not explain themselves, and are not products of pure reason. It is true that their full explanation requires a careful study of the social and economic conditions in which they flourish. It is probably true, as a broad generalization, that of the external conditions of political processes economic processes are the most important. Marx's assertion of these truths further was salutary and timely; for though they are at least as old as Aristotle and had been re-asserted with emphasis by Bentham, they were not truths which the mind of the time, nor even Bentham himself, had fully grasped. They are in fact truths which man is always apt to forget, and has therefore constantly to discover afresh. But none of these truths, nor all of them taken together, will suffice to constitute the doctrine of economic materialism with which Marx's name is inseparably connected. The second half of the statement formulates this principle with the aid of five terms: (1) material productive forces, (2) necessary productive relationships, independent of volition, between man and man, (3) economic structure

¹ *Handbook of Marxism* (ed. E. Burns), Gollancz 1935, p. 371.

of society, (4) juridical and political structure of society, (5) social consciousness. What is asserted is a necessity originating in material productive forces, determining irrevocably, through these three intermediate terms, man's social conscience and judgement of values. The correspondence asserted at each stage is clearly to be read as determination or necessitation by the preceding stage, so that the whole means that if the material productive forces were different, political and social ideas and practice would necessarily be different.

The intention is plainly to eliminate the human will as a true cause of the social and political order. This comes out at both ends of the statement—at the beginning when he says that the starting-point is in material conditions of production which necessitate certain relationships independently of volition—and again at the end when he says that these relationships form the real basis on which a legal and social system arises. It is true that judged by mere logic the last statement is harmless and could be accepted by those who refuse the offered principle of social analysis. Economic facts are certainly real, and equally certainly they are the basis on which legislators build. But the word real is clearly introduced to suggest the relative unreality, the epiphenomenalism, of the decisions taken by legislators and statesmen. The suggestion clearly is that while the accredited leaders seem to themselves to be deciding important questions, and controlling the development of society, the material productive forces are developing on their own account and by their development forcing a parallel development of law and policy. Thus legislators and statesmen are carried passively by a material

evolution to which they contribute nothing. This is clearly the general intention, but neither from this passage, nor from other statements of the position made by Marx and Engels, is it clear how rigid this exclusion of the human will, as a real historical cause, is to be taken as being. Most of their statements seem to leave room for some small residual freedom, such as the earlier materialism of Epicurus provided for with his uncaused and unpredictable swerve of the atom. But at least the assertion is that the main movements of history can be accounted for without attributing any originaive power to the human will. Generally (though not necessarily without minor qualifications), the material conditions of man's social existence determine his ideas and consequently his line of action.

The correctness of this interpretation is confined by the following concise statement of the position made by Engels in his *Anti-Dühring*:¹

‘The Materialist conception of history starts from the principle that production, and with production the exchange of its products, is the basis of every social order; that in every society which has appeared in history the distribution of the products, and with it the division of society into classes or estates, is determined by what is produced and how it is produced, and how the product is exchanged. According to this conception, the ultimate causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in the minds of men, in their increasing insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange; they are to be sought not in the philosophy but in the economics of the epoch concerned. The growing realization that existing social institutions are irrational and unjust, that reason has become nonsense and good deeds a scourage, is only a sign that changes have been taking place quietly in the methods of production and forms of exchange

¹ *Handbook of Marxism*, p. 279.

with which the social order, adapted to previous economic conditions, is no longer in accord. This also involves that the means through which the abuses that have been revealed can be got rid of must likewise be present, in more or less developed form, in the altered conditions of production. These means are not to be *invented* by the mind, but *discovered* by means of the mind, in the existing material facts of production.'

Here, quite explicitly, the ultimate causes of social change are found in natural facts external to and independent of the minds and wills of men, to which these minds and wills are forced in the end to conform. It is further, however, recognized that the old ideas and habits may persist after the material conditions have made them obsolete, and from the tension thus set up in the body of society arise the revolutions that figure so prominently in history. In each of them new economic relations break violently the bonds of an obsolete legal and social order, and in each the new economic forces produce, after longer or shorter delay, new legal and social forms appropriate to themselves. It is to be noted that here human social ideals are credited with a certain power, but only with the negative power of delay and obstruction, due to the fact that they are apt to be rooted in the past rather than the present. They have no positive contribution to make, and therefore are not reckoned among the causes of social development.

It will be remembered that in Aristotle's theory of causation, matter, though reckoned a cause, is not an active agent. The only active agent is Form, of the realization of which matter, in virtue of its receptivity, is a *conditio sine qua non* (οὐδ' οὐκ ἄνευ). The only independent contribution matter can make to the result shows itself as defect and failure, and is due to matter's

capricious resistance to the activity of form. For Marx and Engels conversely the material conditions are the real causes, receptivity is the best that can be said of mind, which also has the power of resisting and delaying the forces of material evolution. Thus Marx turns Aristotle, as well as Hegel, upside down.

This interpretation of social development, which denies all positive contribution to the political factor and ultimately to the human will, is recommended by its advocates as a *scientific* conception of history. In Russia to-day it is passionately advocated in this sense, as an interpretation which is in line with the work of Charles Darwin and the other great triumphs of nineteenth- and twentieth-century science. And though many of the greatest scientists, including Charles Darwin himself, might have strongly resisted this assessment of their work, it cannot be denied that there is much truth in it. The scientist generally works by a method of analysis which always in the result, so far as it is successful, exhibits large-scale visible processes as the necessary resultant of small-scale processes which are not revealed to the eye at all or revealed only through the microscope. This means that the active forces at work in any process are not the substances familiar in common speech and natural history, but always certain other substances which belong to a lower structural and evolutionary level. For the change of scale does not bring into play other substances of the same kind, but substances of a more primitive character, which are the vehicle not merely of this large-scale process but also of innumerable others as well. Ultimately the scientist takes us back to atom and electron which are to be conceived as the universal basis of all

physical processes whatever. It is surely quite clear that the retreat of the economic materialist to the material productive forces for a ground of explanation of social changes is of precisely the same order as the retreat of the scientist to the atom. In these he hopes to find the common ground of all social changes and conformations whatever, and so to be able to get rid of principles of explanation, like national character, racial type, dominant ideas, outstanding personalities, which have a more restricted range or have their application only within the selected field. To get this common ground he, like the scientist, has to fall back from the higher to the lower structural level. Material productive forces, in which he finds the real basis and true cause, are avowedly below the level of life; and when mind enters into his account of the matter, it enters primarily in respect of those primitive needs and impulses, such as those connected with food and sex, which are most universal among men and provide the preconditions of man's higher life. That higher life is regarded as merely the resultant echo of these more primitive processes, which are themselves creatures of the material conditions of life. If we give the terms higher and lower a strictly evolutionary significance, so that the lower is what is necessary for the existence of the higher and the higher is what is built upon the lower as its precondition, we can say that the principle is the explanation of the higher without remainder in terms of the lower. Or, to put it otherwise, no principle derived from a given level of being is to be accepted if a principle derived from a lower level of being will fit the facts.

From this we see, to put the matter in a few words,

that the economic interpretation of history is an attempt to introduce the materialism which is characteristic of natural science into the fields of history. An attitude or rule of method which has for centuries been traditional and normal among scientists is introduced into company in which it appears as a paradox or even as an outrage. For the historian sets out to tell the story of man and his doings, and his natural basis is the assumption that men are of some importance, at least to men, and that their actions have, for men at least, some creative power. If this doctrine is true, the historian is now found to have been wasting his time under the spell of ancient romantic delusions. He has only to borrow the scientist's microscope to find all that he has laboriously deciphered from stone and parchment, from letters and documents, all the narrative that he has constructed with more than detective ingenuity from these and other sources, rendered unnecessary and inaccurate by the simpler and grander story of the material productive forces and their development. But the historian knows in his heart that if he accepts this, he commits suicide: for this story, when it is written, will not be history at all: it will be a chapter in the book of science. By its original commission history must tell the story of man, and if man is the mere creature of his environment, man has no history.

Thus materialism applied to history destroys history, as in our previous example materialism applied to democracy annihilated government.

IV

Conclusion

I believe it can be shown that materialism in all its various forms is false, in that it offers a theory of the world which does not make sense of it. The material factor is not, as the theory would have it, the real agent in physical and social change. There is always a formative factor of a higher order at work on which growth and development wholly depend. But I am not concerned in this lecture to develop an alternative general theory of the causal process. I wish to confine my view, as far as possible, to the two examples of materialism which I have brought forward and to the social field to which they belong. In these concluding remarks, which must be brief, I want to call attention to the practical harm which these false ideas have power to do, and to the practical gains which would accrue if they could be disposed of.

The two doctrines have the common characteristic that so far as they are believed man's sense of responsibility is seriously weakened. A statesman who accepts Rousseau's conception of democracy no longer has any important questions to decide for himself: his business with them is merely to see that they are decided for him. A voter inspired by the same doctrine will make no painful personal sacrifice for a principle when he finds the majority against him: he will see at once—so Rousseau actually argued—that he has made a mistake of fact: that he was in error when he gave his vote. In voting he was seeking to formulate the general will, and this now turns out to have been the reverse of what he thought it was. The responsibility is corporate: the

individual, whether voter or statesman, escapes it, and it is impossible, as Burke observes, to indict a whole nation.

From the doctrine of economic materialism, similar consequences even more evidently follow. How can a statesman who believes that it is not he that thinks and wills but material forces that pursue their inevitable course through him attach independent value to his fears and scruples? How can he measure his work otherwise than by its actual efficacy? He can have no independent standard or ideal by which to judge the facts, only those prejudices which birth and upbringing have ingrained in him; and a conflict between these and immediate urgencies can be no more than the vain struggle of the past against the present. Hegel's dark saying now gets its full value—*die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*; or, as we might put it more bluntly, from fact there is no appeal.

There thus arises a mood of fatalism, which is one of the most prevalent and disabling weaknesses of the modern world. We look at the disquieting phenomena of our day objectively and scientifically: we study with care and exactness their genesis and their dimensions. We follow them to their roots in human folly and weakness, and in the faulty conditions of life of which these are bred. We see them as the incidental outcome of a secular process which in its continuation in the course of centuries may incidentally extrude them. Where our fathers would have said: 'Here is a wrong to be righted: let us see what can be done about it', we in our greater wisdom say: 'Yes, the case is bad, but it has a long history, and no one is really to blame: it will get worse for certain before it gets better', and

satisfied with having diagnosed the disease and prophesied the disaster, we leave the cure to nature.

It is often said in these days that the weakening of principle, which is so plain a feature of this post-war world, is a consequence of the diminished hold which religion has on men's minds. How far this may be so I do not know, but it seems to me that what the modern world wants to arrest its rake's progress is two things, which are really one, a belief in the efficacy of ideas and a belief in the freedom of the human will. This is the faith that under the spell of scientific materialism we are in danger of losing, and I doubt if any revival of religion could be guaranteed to win it back for us. The trust in reason which is the first article of this faith is inseparably bound up with the consciousness of freedom which is the second. For if thought is not free, if it is only a mirror held up to nature, then will is not free either. And the will which is not controlled by reason must be totally immoral and irresponsible. It is true that man is in large measure the creature of circumstance. Reason itself helps to bind him more tightly to circumstance, since it is essentially a consciousness of fact, and a reasonable creature can be seen to differ from one that is unreasonable precisely in the range and rapidity of its adjustment to fact. But it is also of the essence of reason that the consciousness of fact is always at the same time a valuation of it, and therefore the adjustment to environment includes always the effort to transform it. Here is the salt that gives the savour, the yeast that leavens the lump. This is the creative form, of which materialism is the denial.

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